

A Cross Case Analysis of Successful Early Reading Programs in High Poverty, High Performing Schools

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Reading Achievement for Children Living in Poverty

- 20-25% of U.S. children are living in poverty.
- Students placed at risk by poverty are not evenly distributed among America's schools
- Many are concentrated in high poverty urban schools.
- 1998 NAEP 4th Grade Reading,
 - ◆ 50% children in poverty scored below the “basic” level; and,
 - ◆ 84% below “proficient” level.



Views that Ground the Study

- Good first teaching in reading is essential (Snow et al., 1998).
- Learning to read predominates in the primary grades (Fisher & Hiebert, 1990).
- Attributes of schoolwide programming can lead to schoolwide reading achievement (Hoffman & Rutherford, 1984).
- Schools can make a difference (Darling-Hammond, 1997; Rossi & Stringfield, 1997; Stringfield, 1994).



Study Questions

- What characteristics do high-poverty, high-performing schools share that distinguish them from their low-performing counterparts?
- How do these schools plan, organize, implement, and sustain their successful early reading programs within available resources?



Data Collection Phases

- Phase 1: Schools identified & surveyed (in collaboration with other CIERA research, Taylor & Pearson)
 - ◆ Criteria:
 - ◆ 50% eligible for Free & Reduced Lunch
 - ◆ 50% achieving satisfactory on 3/4 grade reading
 - ◆ Over 430 Schools Identified
 - ◆ 140 in 39 states return completed surveys
 - ◆ 7 per school (1 principal, 6 teachers)



Phases (cont'd)

- Phase 3: Case studies
 - ◆ 52 audiotaped interviews(45-60 minutes each)
 - ◆ Other on-site interviews, not audiotaped
 - ◆ 10-12 hours classroom observations per school
 - ◆ Field and journal notes
 - ◆ Artifacts from early reading programs
 - ◆ Relevant school, district, and state document obtained
 - ◆ Program histories (6-10 years back)



Phases (cont'd)

- Phase 4: Comparison schools
 - ◆ 1-2 High Poverty -Low Achieving schools identified
 - ◆ Invitations to participate sent to 31 schools (follow up is on going as of this report)
- Phase 5: Analysis and Writing
 - ◆ Individual cases
 - ◆ Cross Case



Case Study Schools

- ◆ Urban/urban fringe locations (1 border school; 1 year round)
- ◆ Pre-K - Grade 5 (3 schools Pre K-5; 3 schools K-5)
- ◆ 2 Schools with Spanish language bilingual programs
- ◆ Outperformed and/or approximated district and/or state 3rd/4th grade reading achievement at satisfactory and above levels over at least a 3-year period.
- ◆ Higher percentage of students eligible for FRL than district and state averages



Case Study Schools (cont'd)

◆ FRL	50%	-	89%
◆ Mobility	21%	-	40%
◆ Enrollment	412	-	829
◆ LEP	0%	-	37%
◆ Class Size	20	-	29
◆ Per Pupil	\$4002	-	\$4983



Case Study Schools (cont'd)

- 91% African American
- 67% white
- 95% Hispanic
- 48% white and 47% students of color (African American and Hispanic)
- 74 % students of color (African American and Hispanic)
- 67% students of color (African American and Hispanic)



Case Study Participants

- ◆ Building Administrators
- ◆ Reading Specialists
- ◆ Pre-K-3 Teaching Staff
- ◆ Others (e.g. Special education teachers, librarian, attendance officer, classroom aides, etc.)



What characteristics do these schools share?

- ◆ Key Elements of School Operation
- ◆ Key Elements of Early Reading Program
- ◆ Implications for Resource Allocation



Key Elements of School Operation

- Leadership
 - ◆ Administrative
 - ◆ Instructional
- Core of Teachers
 - ◆ Experienced
 - ◆ Knowledgeable



Key Elements of School Operation (cont'd)

- Shared Responsibility & Early Reading Focus
 - ◆ School Improvement Teams
 - ◆ Student Support Teams
- Professional Development
 - ◆ On-going
 - ◆ School, district, & personal



Key Elements of School Operation (cont'd)

- Collaboration/team approach to planning
 - ◆ Vertical - across grade levels
 - ◆ Horizontal - within grade levels
 - ◆ Curriculum and instruction
 - ◆ Individual children



Key Elements of Early Reading Program

- Flexible and dynamic student grouping
 - ◆ Grouping occurs dependent upon need (whole group, small group, & one on one)
 - ◆ Group membership changes as often as every two weeks
- Ongoing student assessment for instruction
 - ◆ On a daily/weekly basis, e.g., running records or high frequency word lists
 - ◆ Less frequent, e.g. basal unit tests



Key Elements of Early Reading Program (cont'd)

- Multiple approaches to reading instruction
 - ◆ No one philosophy espoused
 - ◆ Attention paid to both whole language and phonics strategies
 - ◆ Writing on a regular basis
- Safety nets for struggling readers



Safety Nets for Struggling Readers

During School day	Before/After School	Extended Year
<ul style="list-style-type: none">•One on One Tutoring Reading Recovery•Small Group Project Read Structure of Intellect•Whole Class 3rd Grade Academy Literacy Rotation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•One on One Tutoring•Small Group Extended Day Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none">•Small Group Summer School Inter-session Extended year



Resource Allocation Implications

- Funding
 - ◆ Per pupil funding is not significantly different from other schools in same district.
 - ◆ Use of Title I Schoolwide funding has aided schools in implementing programs.
 - ◆ Being proactive helps schools take advantage of resources when available.



Resource Allocation Implications (cont'd)

- Programmatic decisions
 - ◆ Decisions made at school level
 - ◆ Systems in place to deal with concerns and requests for program implementation, e.g. school improvement teams, student support teams.



Resource Allocation Implications (cont'd)

- Time
 - ◆ Each of these programs developed over an extended period of time.
 - ◆ This development time allowed for experimentation.
 - ◆ Allocation of time throughout the day and year for instruction and planning has been crucial.



Conclusion

- Each school has strong leadership at the school level and competent instruction at the classroom level.
- Each school has systematic schoolwide arrangements to provide continuous support struggling readers.
- Each school has well developed procedures for program implementation.



Conclusion (cont'd)

- Programs themselves appear to be idiosyncratic.
- None of these schools have achieved success over night.
- Essentially, these are “blameless” schools where everyone operates from an “if there’s a problem we can fix it” mode.





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